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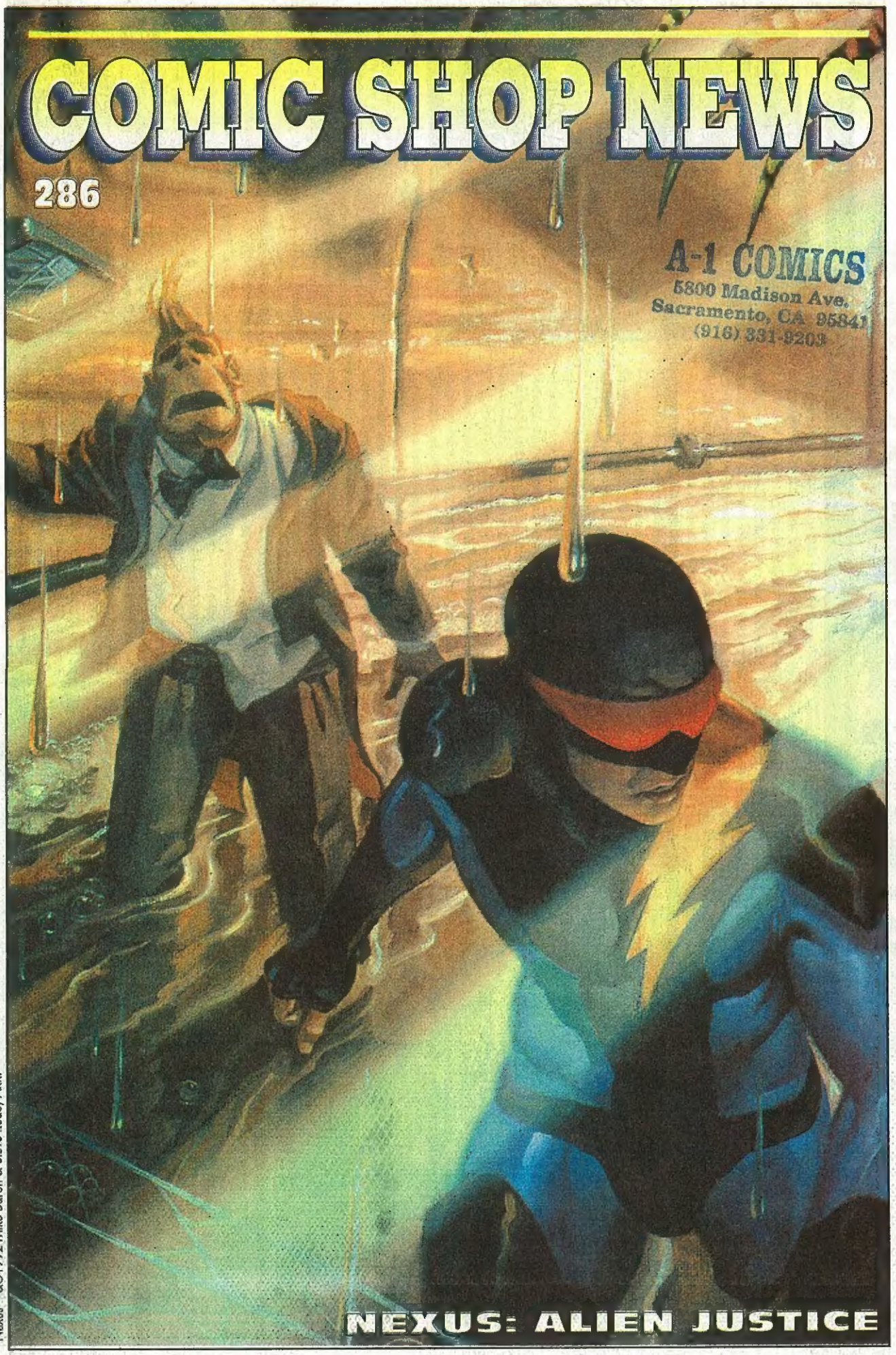

NEXUS: ALIEN JUSTICE

Nexus ™&©1992 Mike Baron & Steve Rude, ARR.

Changes Vex Nexus

It's been a few years since Mike Baron and Steve Rude teamed up to create a Nexus adventure—and when they reunite on Nexus' latest miniseries, they have a lot of surprises in store... some of which aren't going to be too pleasant for Horatio Hellpop, the current Nexus (or his friends, for that matter).

It appears that Horatio's triumphant return to comics may be short-lived; in the first issue of the new miniseries, Nexus meets his very large—and very ominous-looking—replacement. It's not a particularly good time for Horatio to lose the Nexus powers, either; his good friend Dave has returned to his homeworld to discover that it has been devastated and corrupted by a corporate magnate who intends to make a profit off every natural resource Thune has to offer... including its populace.

Of course, Nexus' many fans are confident that Baron and Rude will save their hero from forced retirement; after all, they wouldn't bring Nexus back in the three issue ***Nexus: Alien Justice*** miniseries just to force him out of the superhero biz, would they?...

There are a few other good omens indicating that Horatio still has a future. For instance, Dark Horse is currently putting the finishing touches on a stunning Nexus cold-cast porcelain sculpture designed by Clayburn Moore; look for it sometime in mid-'93.

Nexus: Alien Justice #1, the first 48-page issue of a three-issue miniseries, is scheduled for late December release.

by Cliff Biggers

Once More, X Marks The Spot For Skybox

Last spring, Skybox released its ***X-Men Series I Trading Cards*** to a very enthusiastic audience—in fact, the enthusiasm was so great that Skybox sold out of the entire run in a matter of days. With a response that strong, could there be any doubt that an ***X-Men II Trading Card*** series would become a part of Skybox's trading card plans for 1993?...

Once again, the ***X-Men II Trading Cards*** will be released in six-card packs tentatively priced at $1 per pack. This time, though, Skybox is increasing the number and variety of special bonus cards, adding foil-enhanced cards and a special 3-D card to the holograms that have become a standard "chase" card for the company.

According to Skybox's George White, "Each card will feature an original work of art created exclusively for the card line by Marvel's best known 'X' artists, bursting through an all-new, bold border design. Card backs include additional artwork, a DNA Analysis of characters' mutant powers, and personal file notes from Professor X, the leader of the X-Men.

"As a Skybox first, three levels of bonus cards will be randomly packed in a limited number of six-card ***X-Men II*** packs, including nine foil-stamped cards, three full-color holograms, and one special 3-D card. The three bonus card production processes are used to enhance original works of art prepared for this card series."

The one-hundred card series will feature a variety of categories, including super-heroes, super-villains, teams, arch-enemies, and animation cards based on the Fox-TV ***X-Men*** cartoon show.

X-Men Series II Trading Cards, available individually at $1 per pack or in 36-pack boxes, are scheduled for February, 1993, release.

by Alex Kirkland

Get Ready For Some High Mys-TECH Action

For the better part of 1992, Marvel's heroes—both British and American—have been involved with a growing struggle with the malevolent, mystical/tech-nological organization Mys-TECH. The action comes to a head in early 1993 when virtually every Marvel UK hero join forces with a myriad of Marvel US heroes to confront Mys-TECH for what they hope will be the final battle.

Mys-TECH Wars, a four-issue limited series, begins with Mys-TECH's successful completion of its UnEarth Project. Marvel's Kevin Tang describes UnEarth as "a voodoo-doll-like replica of our own planet." Mys-TECH intends to use this UnEarth to destroy our own world—but when Nick Fury uncovers their plan, he calls on the Marvel Universe's most powerful heroes to thwart their plan. The X-Men, the Fantastic Four, X-Force, Dark Angel, Motormouth, the Knights of Pendragon, Warheads, and many others come together to save the planet.

Mys-TECH Wars is written by Dan Abnett, the writer responsible for the hot ***Death's Head II*** series. He is joined by illustrator Bryan Hitch, whose work has appeared in ***She-Hulk*** and ***Dark Angel.***

Mys-TECH Wars #1, a $1.75 comic, is scheduled for January 28th release. Marvel stresses that this isn't the wrap-up of the Marvel UK line by any means; quite the contrary, the series will lead to an exciting new direction for these titles and will provide a "launching pad" for additional Marvel UK books.

by Wayne Lee

Starlin the Artist Returns to the Cosmic Book Biz

In the 1970's and the 1980's, Jim Starlin rose through the ranks to become one of the most admired—and one of the most influential—comic book artists at both Marvel and DC. He became one of the first highly successful writer/artists, bringing a cosmic approach to comics —an approach whose influence can be seen in virtually every company's superhero lines.

In more recent years, though, Starlin the artist has been far less evident that Starlin the writer. Starlin has contributed stories for ***Silver Surfer, Warlock, Infinity Gauntlet, Infinity War, Punisher: POV, Batman, Batman: The Cult, The Weird,*** and many other comics; art fans have yearned for him to return to illustration, though.

Those art fans will be very happy come next January—because that's when Starlin takes the helm to write and illustrate a four-issue limited series starring two characters with whom he is closely associated: Silver Surfer and Warlock.

In ***Silver Surfer/Warlock: Resurrection***, Warlock becomes convinced that Shalla Bal, the long-lost love of the Silver Surfer who has been presumed dead, is alive. Once he relays this information to the Silver Surfer, the Surfer wants to find her—and he asks the Infinity Watch for their help. Even though the relationship between the Surfer and Warlock isn't wholly amicable, Warlock agrees to help—but he demands that the Silver Surfer agree to pay an undisclosed price at some point in the future. The Surfer agrees, and the group launches into a mission that takes them into the realm of Death and the nightmarish world of Mephisto.

Jim Starlin is fully illustrating the first issue of ***Silver Surfer/Warlock: Resurrection***; the other three issues of the series will be inked by Terry Austin. ***Silver Surfer/Warlock: Resurrection #1,*** a $2.50 comic printed on high quality full gloss Hudson stock, is scheduled for January 21st release.

by Cliff Biggers

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Image Spawns Some Interesting Team-Ups

Just how many Spawns have there been? That's an answer that *Todd McFarlane* hasn't revealed to Spawn fans just yet—but there was obviously at least one other, because Angela destroyed that Spawn eight centuries ago. And now, she's ready to relive old times by destroying the current Spawn... and, according to Image Comics, she's going to succeed!...

Spawn #9 introduces Angela in a special issue written by *Neil Gaiman*, the critically acclaimed writer of ***Sandman.*** This is the second of three issues featuring a guest writer (***Spawn #8*** is written by *Alan Moore* and ***Spawn #10*** is written by *Dave Sim*). "The best part of Image Comics is that I get to hand-pick the guys I work with," Spawn creator Todd McFarlane said. "So why wouldn't I choose the best? Neil Gaiman is both one of the best and critically acclaimed as well." McFarlane will be on hand to supply the visuals for the issue, of course. ***Spawn #9***, a $1.95 comic, is scheduled for January release.

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Amazing Heroes Finds a Friendly Home

Amazing Heroes, the acclaimed comic fan magazine that was recently put on hiatus by Fantagraphics Publishing, has found a new home beginning next year. Friendly Comics, Inc., publishers of books under the Friendly and Personality Imprints, has acquired ***Amazing Heroes*** from Fantagraphics and will begin publishing the title once again in early 1993.

"The first product to be released will be an all-new swimsuit issue featuring the new format and new look of ***Amazing Heroes***," *Eric Sheffer-man*, president of Friendly Comics, said. "After this kickoff, the new monthly ***Amazing Heroes*** will be launched. A new dedication to high quality art and editorial content, along with a new color interior, will help make ***Amazing Heroes*** the number one fanzine for the comic industry."

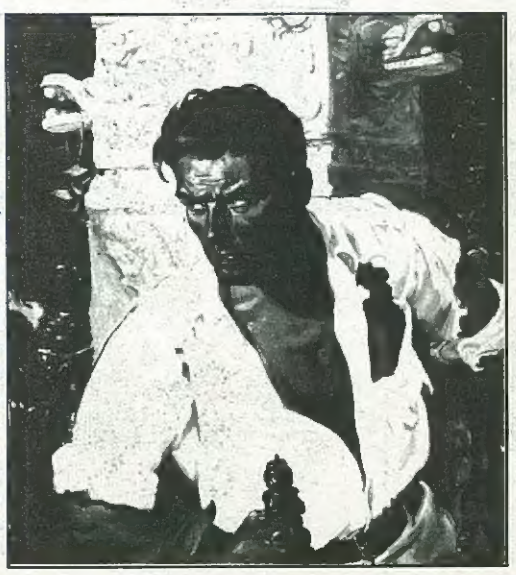
Amazing Heroes Swimsuit Special #4, a 48-page book published half in full color and half in black and white, features artwork by *Michael Bair, Mark Beachum, Cully Hamner, Tony Harris, Adam Hughes, Dave Johnson, Joe Linsner, Jason Pearson, Joe Phillips, Tony Salmons, Brian Stelfreeze*, and many others. Slated for March '93 release, the book is priced at $3.95.

X-Men Out-Fox the Competition

Obviously there are quite a few of you out there who want to see the ***X-Men*** on TV on a regular basis. According to Marvel's *Skip Dietz*, "Fox has released its listing of its most popular cartoon shows, and the ***X-Men*** took first place, beating ***Tiny Toons*** and ***Batman***!" This is doubly remarkable, since the X-Men have only aired a couple of times thus far, with relatively little advance fanfare. Naturally, Fox is sufficiently impressed that they're rushing ***X-Men*** episodes through the final stages of production so that they can get the cartoon show on the air ASAP; keep an eye on your local TV listings to see when it joins the regular Saturday schedule. Fox is also planning to re-air the already-run episodes, so keep an eye out for an hour-long double episode as well. (Of course, the success of the cartoon show is also generating legions of fans for Marvel's ***X-Men Adventures*** comic book series, which features single-issue stories in the style of the animated series. Many long-time ***X-Men*** fans are also avid fans of the new comic series, since it is remarkably faithful to the style and content of the standard ***X-Men*** series.)

Own The Mullah...For Not Too Much Moolah

Graphitti Designs, which has already offered Doc Savage fans three high-quality lithographs of *James Bama* Doc Savage cover paintings, is delving deep into Doc's past in 1993 to produce the earliest James Bama Doc Savage painting yet. ***The Mystic Mullah*** features the image from the cover of ***Doc Savage*** paperback #9 (is there anyone out there who, along with some of the ***CSN*** staff, remember buying this book for its 45¢ cover price all those years ago?...). As was the case with the three earlier Bama prints, the first 150 are available only in a signed and numbered print priced at $125 (still a bargain when you consider how expensive Bama's Western art lithos are); numbers 151 through 1100 are available in an unsigned edition for $29.95. As with all specialty items of this sort, be sure to let your local comic shop know that you're interested...and tell 'em that you heard about it in ***CSN,*** okay?...



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Does the Punisher Have a Ghost of a Chance?...

The Punisher has been driven to wreak vengeance against criminals of all types by the memory of his own family, brutally murdered at the hands of lawbreakers. However, inn the new two-issue prestige-format series ***Punisher: The Ghosts of Innocents,*** it's not memories that drive Frank Castle on...it's ghosts! In this case, it's the ghosts of innocent bystanders who are murdered by the Kingpin's men, while the Punisher is unable to do anything to save them due to a debilitating blow to the head. Now he wants to track down the drug dealers who are responsible—not only for himself, but because he believes he is haunted by the ghosts of the victims who can't rest until their crime is avenged.

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Punisher: Ghosts of the Innocents is written by *Jim Starlin*, who has previously penned the Punisher's exploits in ***Punisher: POV***. He is joined by artist *Tom Grindberg*, well known to fans for his Neal Adams-ish art in the pages of various Batman books, including ***Batman: Bride of the Demon. Punisher: Ghosts of the Innocents #1,*** a $5.95 comic, is slated to hit the comic racks on January 7th.

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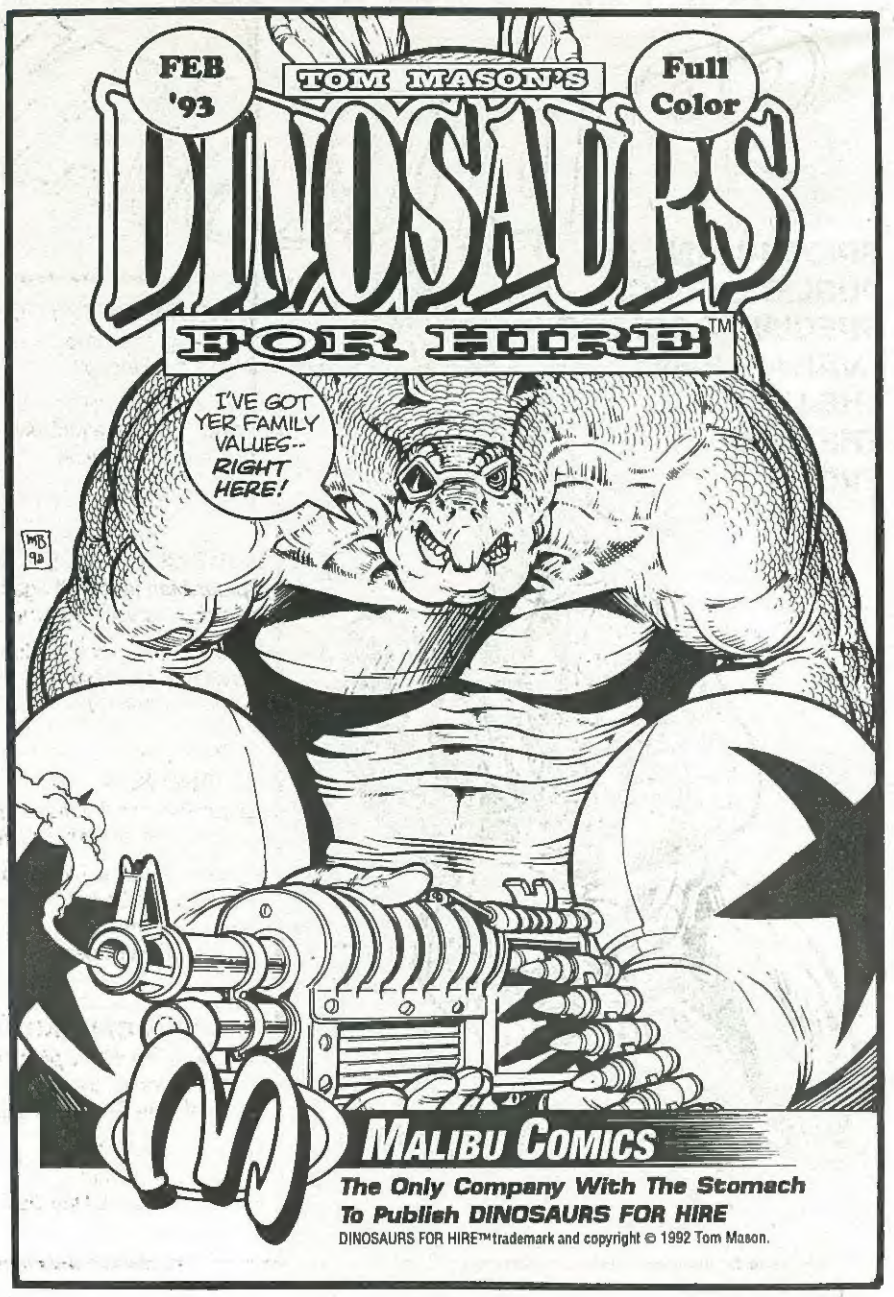
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Modesty Blaises Into Action

Modesty Blaise, the former thief turned freelance espionage operative and private detective, has been involved in one dangerous case after another in her thirty-year history (yes, believe it or not, Modesty Blaise has been in action almost as long as James Bond has appeared in films, and her adventures predate ***The Man From UNCLE, The Avengers***, and other popular espionage-adventure series!). Modesty has starred in a long-running newspaper comic strip, but she has never starred in an American comic book—until now, that is.

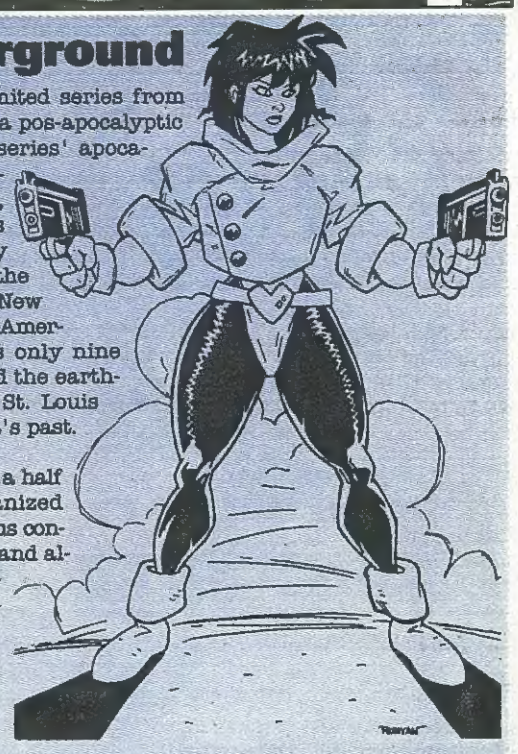
Modesty Blaise, a three-issue prestige-format limited series, will pit Modesty and her right-hand-man, Willie Garvin, against the unconventional terrorist Gabriel. The series will emphasize the international intrigue and exotic locales that have accented the Modesty Blaise novels and comic strips.

DC's ***Modesty Blaise*** is written by *Peter O'Donnell*, the heroine's writer/creator. The artwork is supplied by *Dick Giordano*, who has illustrated quite a few espionage-adventure series during his forty-year career. Steve Oliff will supply the color. ***Modesty Blaise #1,*** a $4.95 comic, is scheduled for February 4th release.

A WOMAN!
UHHH!
I THINK WHEN GENERAL ALVAREZ COMES, HE WILL TELL US TO HANG THE PRISONERS.
IT MAKES SOMETHING DIFFERENT TO DO.
QUITE STILL, PLEASE--
--OR MY NEXT TARGET WILL BE AN EYE, SERGEANT... DO YOU PREFER LEFT OR RIGHT?
0:04:00
0:09:45

Velvet Underground

Velvet, a new four-issue limited series from Adventure Comics, is set in a pos-apocalyptic American future—but this series' apocalypse isn't the typical nuclear-war type. Instead, writer *Kirk Chritton* presents an America devastated by twin earthquakes—one on the West Coast and one on the New Madrid Fault in the middle of America. The hero, Velvet, was only nine years old when she survived the earthquake's devastation; when St. Louis was destroyed, so was Velvet's past.



Velvet picks up a decade and a half after the earthquake; organized crime has gained a tremendous control over American society, and almost every crime goes without punishment if the criminal knows the right loopholes. In this corrupt world, Velvet operates outside of the law, enforcing her own moral code... which is without loopholes...

Velvet #1, illustrated by *Mark Runyan*, is a $2.50 comic scheduled for January release.

A Frank Look at The Hulk

Fans have wondered who would step in to fill the shoes of *Dale Keown*, former ***Incredible Hulk*** artist who recently left Marvel to create his own comic, ***Pitt,*** for Image. Well, wonder no longer, because Marvel has named the art team who'll be joining writer *Peter David* to chronicle the Hulk's exploits. Like Peter David, one of the new artists seems to be blessed with two first names: *Gary Frank*. The other member of the art team is *Cam Smith;* together, the two have produced the Marvel UK hit ***Motormouth.***

Incredible Hulk #403, the first book with the new team, guest-stars the Avengers, who launch an assault on the Red Skull's forces. Who would have expected the Hulk to stand in their way?... Find out why on January 21st.

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Writer: Dwayne McDuffie
Penciler: Alex Saviuk
Inker: Chris Ivy

DOUBLE TROUBLE
Spider-Man faces off against a criminal spy, the *Chameleon*!
Writer: Dwayne McDuffie
Penciler: Herb Trimpe
Inker: Chris Ivy

HIT AND RUN
Ghost Rider and *Spider-Man* take on a hit and run driver!
Writer: Dwayne McDuffie
Penciler: Jim Craig
Inker: Chris Ivy & Don Hudson

CHAOS IN CALGARY
Rodeo action with *Spidey* and the *Rangers* vs. their new enemies, the *Frightful Four.*
Writer: Scott Lobdell
Penciler: Jim Craig
Inker: David & Dan Day

MARVEL COMICS

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1972

...THE GOOD TIMES ARE JUST BEGINNING!

GREEN ARROW®
THE WONDER YEAR
A FOUR-PART MINISERIES by MIKE GRELL and GRAY MORROW

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Each month, Cliff Biggers (in plain type) and *Brett Brooks (in italic type)* take a look at a few choice comics scheduled for release in the next few weeks. Publishers interested in having their books considered for review should send copies to ***CSN Give & Take, 2339 Milstead Circle, Marietta GA 30066.*** We'd prefer receiving copies of the books at least thirty days before they're scheduled to reach comic shops. Now that the basics are out of the way, let's take a look at some of the better comics that'll be vying for your attention in the next month or so...

The future of the Marvel Universe has been the subject of a lot of speculation for the past few years. From the distant future of the Guardians of the Galaxy to the near future of the Iron Man of 2020 to the comfortably-distant future of 2099, the Marvel Universe has a pretty rich future history.

But most of it lacks the perverse excitement of the future Marvel Universe of the 2080's courtesy of Peter David.

Future Imperfect, a two-issue Hulk prestige-format miniseries, offers a very dystopian Marvel future that seems to owe more than a little bit to the world of Mad Max. Technology has broken down in the aftermath of a nuclear war. "Funny, ain't it?" Rick Jones asks at one point. "All the good guys protecting humanity from the bad guys, and humanity went and blew itself up real fine without help from anyone in armor or funny longjohns. Go figure... Remember all the reports about how people might survive atomic wars? Exaggerated. All of it." It's an unpleasant world, ruled by an unpleasant tyrant known as The Maestro.

In this future, there are no more superheroes. A small group of people struggle to keep their memories alive—not by becoming costumed heroes on their own, but by preserving a "museum" of sorts devoted to their memories. Shattered remnants of the Marvel superhero universe fill the room... remnants that underscore the obvious: there are no more heroes.

That is, there are no more heroes until a motley group of time-travelers venture back to the contemporary Marvel Universe to bring the Incredible Hulk back with them.

Why the Hulk? Well, for one thing, he has shown an amazing resistance to the debilitating effects of radiation... as has the Maestro. For another thing, he possesses phenomenal strength... as does the Maestro. He never seems to tire... just like the Maestro.

He's also green... just like the Maestro. And he's much larger than the average human... just like the Maestro. And he has a prominent brow... just like the Maestro...

Have any theories as to the Maestro's identity?

Future Imperfect is the sort of bleak revisionist future history that Howard Chaykin has done over at DC in the past—but the styles of Chaykin and David are so very different that the finished product is quite dissimilar. It's the sort of book you want to read twice—once to appreciate the tightly-constructed plot and once more to enjoy the background touches that add depth to the story (touches that are too easy to overlook on the first reading—for example, try to find Waldo in this book...).

The first time I read the book through, I didn't find Waldo—but I sure did find a lot of other things that were thrown in for good measure. You're right about this book being a two-reader, for various reasons; one of the big reasons for me is to catch all of the plot nuances that Peter David works into the book. There are numerous mentions of previous stories in which the Hulk, or other characters—some of them not even from Marvel—were featured prominently. David is one of the best, most consistent writers working in the field today. He has taken ***The Hulk,*** *a book that no one thought could work itself out of the mire of "Hulk smash!" and turned it into a clever and very well written book.*

Not only that, but the Hulk *does* smash a lot of stuff in this series...

Future Imperfect *is a very logical extension of the regular series; in fact, the Maestro makes an appearance in the most recent issue of the Hulk (check it out yourself, it's easier to spot than Waldo), which goes to further show how tightly David is plotting this series. (I found Waldo, by the way.)*

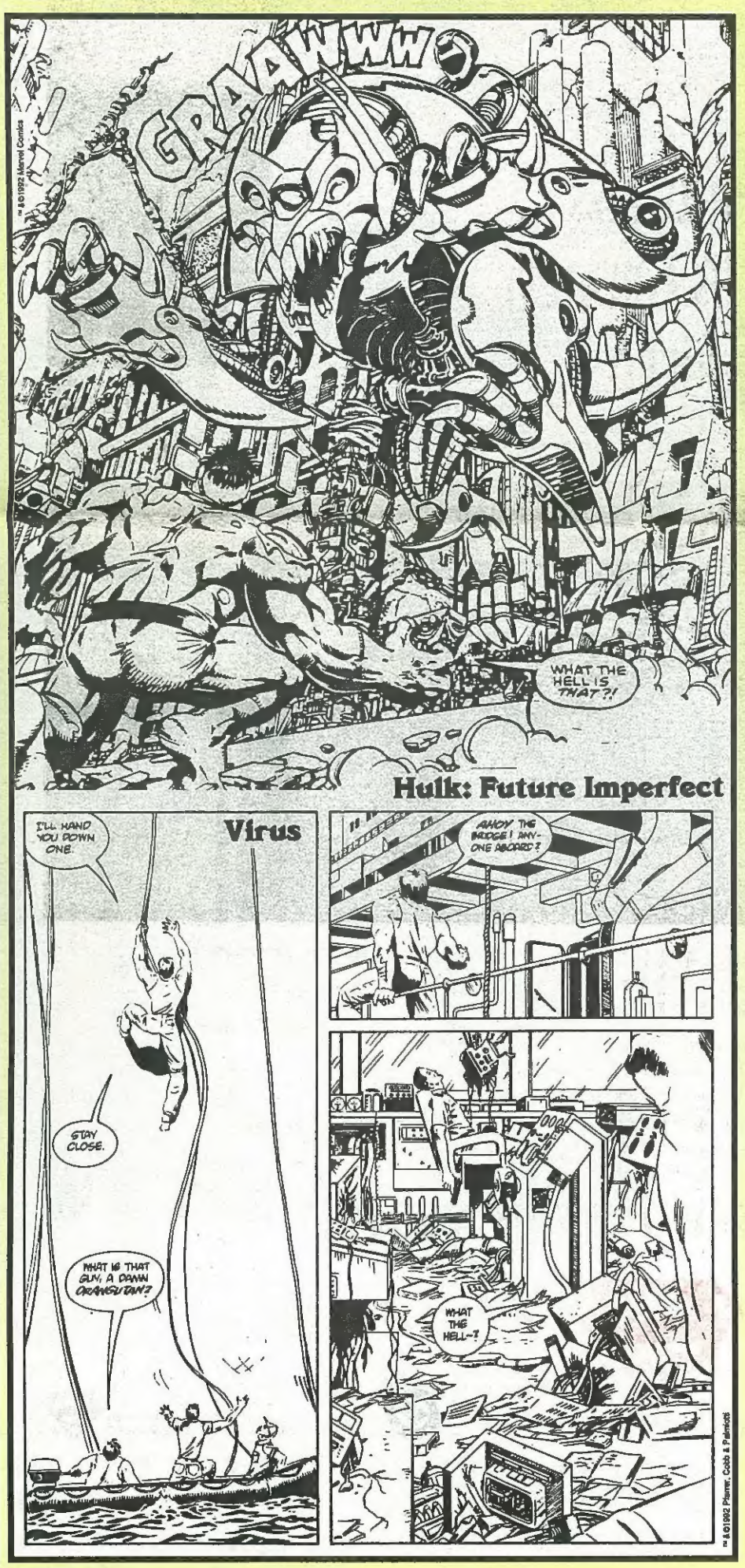
Future Imperfect also marks George Perez's return to top form after a few years of less-than-stellar artwork. There are a lot of fans who are new enough to comics that they probably have no idea why Perez is considered such an important artist; ***Future Imperfect*** will re-establish his artistic talents. He's obviously having a grand time illustrating the story; he's packed in so many extras, so many flourishes and second-reading gems that you really should go through the book a third time without reading it, just to see all the Perezisms lurking in the corners and the shadows.

You may be a bit hard on George, but I do understand your point. Perez is one of the outstanding artists of the past decade, but after ***Crisis on Infinite Earths*** *it seemed like he had lost his will to work. This does seem like more inspired Perez, and what's more, it seems like the type of work that may herald his return to the comics field as a force to be reckoned with.*

Even better, Peter David assures me that George Perez has totally finished both issues of this series and that it should come out on schedule, thereby overcoming the most ominous adversary ever to haunt Perez's recent career—lateness. On time and top-notch... what more could you want?

The Incredible Hulk: Future Imperfect is a prestige-format comic that deserves the prestige-format treatment. You're going to want a durable, high-quality format that'll hold up to repeated readings...

Virus belongs to that small but growing group


GRAAWWW
WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?!
Hulk: Future Imperfect
Virus
I'LL HAND YOU DOWN ONE.
STAY CLOSE.
WHAT IS THAT GUY, A DAMN ORANGUTAN?
AHOY THE BRIDGE! ANY-ONE ABOARD?
WHAT THE HELL--?
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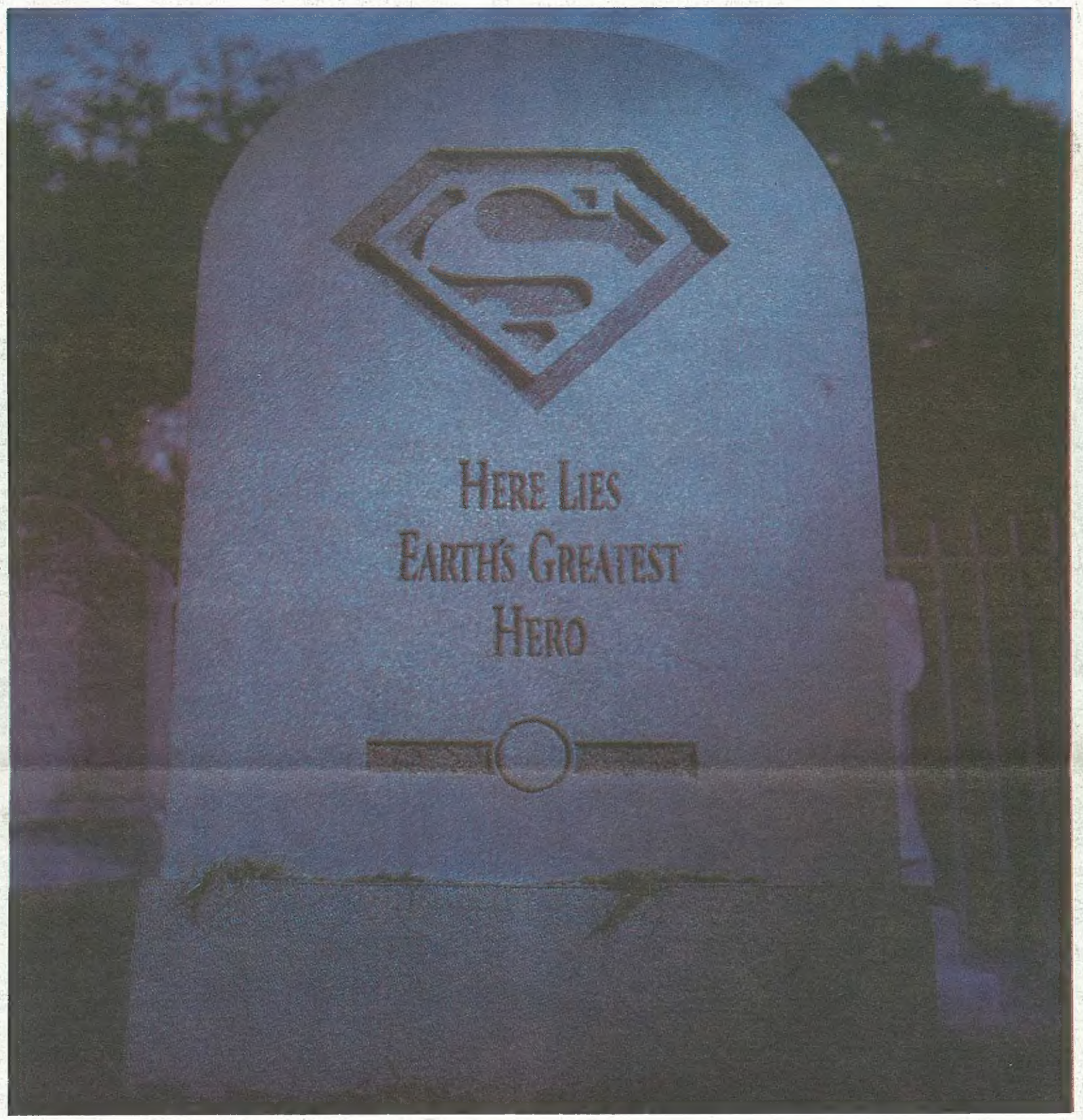

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of comics that can best be described as "blockbuster films that no one has gotten around to making yet." In *Virus*, Chuck Pfarrer (who has already established himself as a screenwriter) has put together a taut science fiction suspense-adventure film in comics form that I find somehow reminiscent of Epic Comics' ***Idol***—not in storyline, mind you, but in style.

Virus is the story of the crew of a hard-luck ocean-going tug, The Electra; the captain of the ship is far more interested in paying the bills than in protecting his crew, and his short-sighted greed soon costs him his load. Serendipitously, a seemingly abandoned Chinese warship, the ***Wan Xuan 3***, looms before them, and the captain sees salvage potential that can offset his losses. What he doesn't realize, though, is that the ship wasn't so much abandoned as it was sacrificed—and what he and his crew find on the ***Wan Xuan 3*** is likely to cost him something far more dear than money...

Virus stars an extraterrestrial computer virus that is more than just a debilitating computer program; it takes on a life of its own and begins building bio-mechanical constructs from the electronics gear on the ***Wan Xuan 3*** and from the corpses of any crew members left behind. Pfarrer tells the story at a break-neck pace, almost dragging the reader through the story without giving him time to catch his breath.

Virus was a surprisingly good book, because I honestly wasn't expecting to like it. I felt that the story would be an all-out gross fest that tried to rely more on shock value than on horror. I was pleasantly disappointed—or surprised, as the case may be. ***Virus*** *was very reminiscent in style to films like* ***Alien****, or even more so like the* ***Thing From Another World****. There is some creature that we don't understand working nearby, and it isn't friendly.*

The sea has always served quite effectively as a literary element of isolation; Pfarrer manages to tap into that isolationist feel. Even before the ***Wan Xuan 3*** enters into the picture, Pfarrer makes it clear that, in the realm of the oceans, the humans aboard this tiny tug are very, very insignificant.

I was very surprised at the tension that Pfarrer managed to build in the story; it is very rare to be turning every page of a comic trying to catch a glimpse of what is affecting the tale.

Howard Cobb and Jimmy Palmiotti tell a solid, capable story visually; this isn't a superhero book, so they don't try to utilize the visual flash so popular in superhero books today. Instead, they use the art to tell the story visually rather than filling it with illustrative but static panels. They display the sort of reliable craftsmanship necessary to keep Pfarrer's story the primary focus of ***Virus***.

I don't know if anyone has any plans to pick up a film option on ***Virus***, but it seems like such a natural that I can't believe it won't happen... soon.

There have been a few cases in comics history where a villain has gained enough of a following to get his own book. I'm not talking about a reformed villain, but a full-fledged, card carrying bad guy. The Joker has a had his own series, and Doctor Doom has had two different ones, and now Venom gets to add his name to the list.

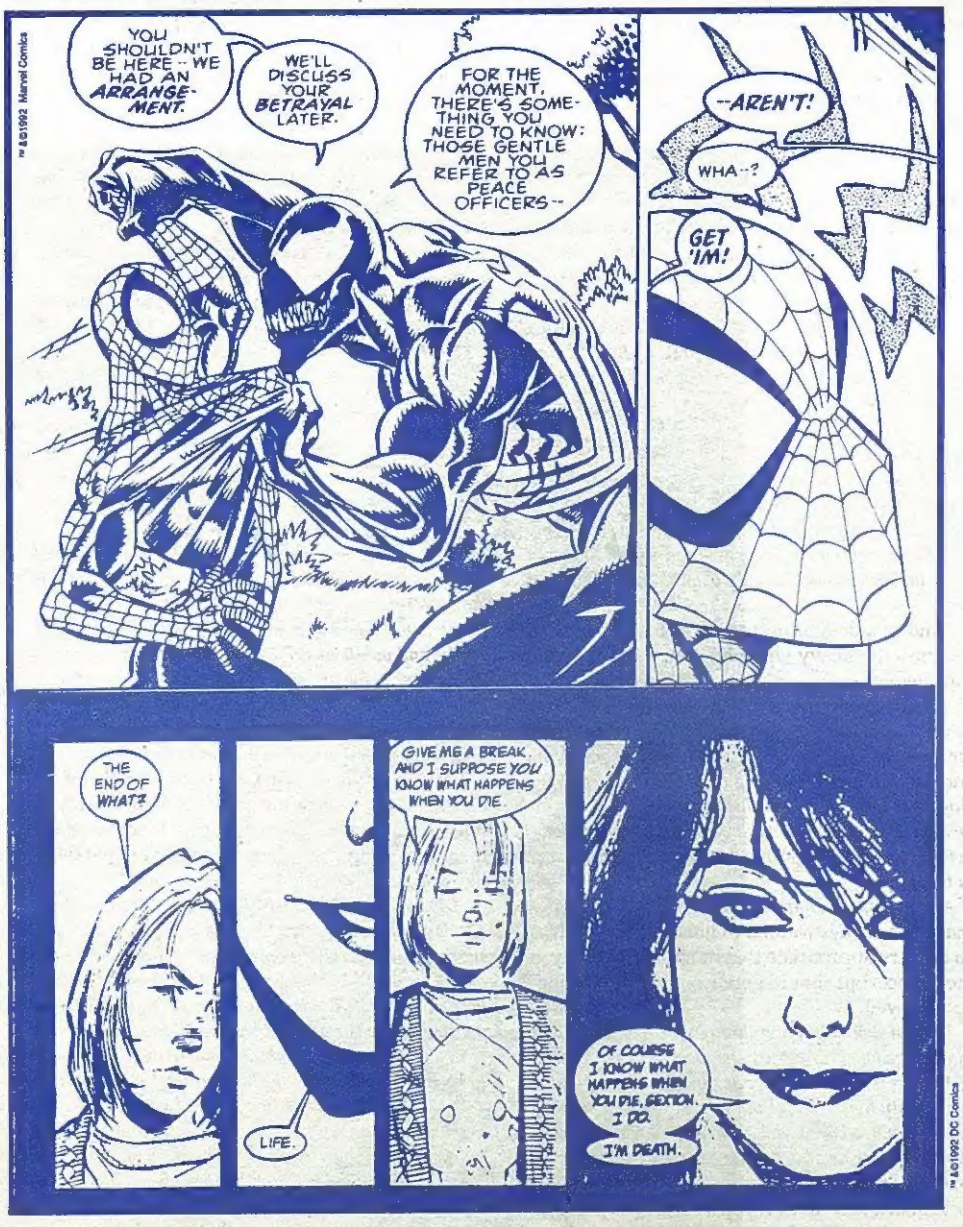
Venom *is a four issue limited series by David Michelinie and Mark Bagley and Sam De LaRosa. I feel that saying that the book stars Venom, is about Venom, and maintains the quality of stories that we are used to seeing with Venom is adequate enough to describe this book to Venom's many fans, considering the remarkable popularity that this character has today—but I'm going to say more anyway.*

I certainly hope so...

Venom is a character who has grown with every appearance that he has made in comics; there aren't many characters that can claim that fact. Before he started popping up in every body else's book, Venom was a character intrinsically linked with Spider-Man—his entire reason for being centered around the web-slinger's existence...or the desire to end Spidey's existence ,to be specific. So what is he doing in his own book that couldn't be done in ***Spider-Man****? Quite a bit, actually.*

Including being the good guy, for once...

Michelinie has developed Venom's personality—or personalities, as the case may be—into a very intricate, and detailed personae. Venom isn't a one dimensional character; Venom's personality is so rich that you begin to want to understand him better—get to know him so to speak. Of course, getting to know him doesn't always mean getting to understand him. In some ways Venom is reminiscent of characters like Hannibal Lechter from ***Silence of the Lambs****, he is a fiend who exists on a level outside of what we consider right and wrong—his motivations are strictly based on his own personal level of experience. Venom has his own code of ethics, and while*


YOU SHOULDN'T BE HERE -- WE HAD AN ARRANGE-MENT.
WE'LL DISCUSS YOUR BETRAYAL LATER.
FOR THE MOMENT, THERE'S SOME-THING YOU NEED TO KNOW: THOSE GENTLE MEN YOU REFER TO AS PEACE OFFICERS --
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--AREN'T!
WHA--?
GET 'IM!
THE END OF WHAT?
LIFE.
GIVE ME A BREAK. AND I SUPPOSE YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIE.
OF COURSE I KNOW WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIE, SECTION. I DO.
I'M DEATH.
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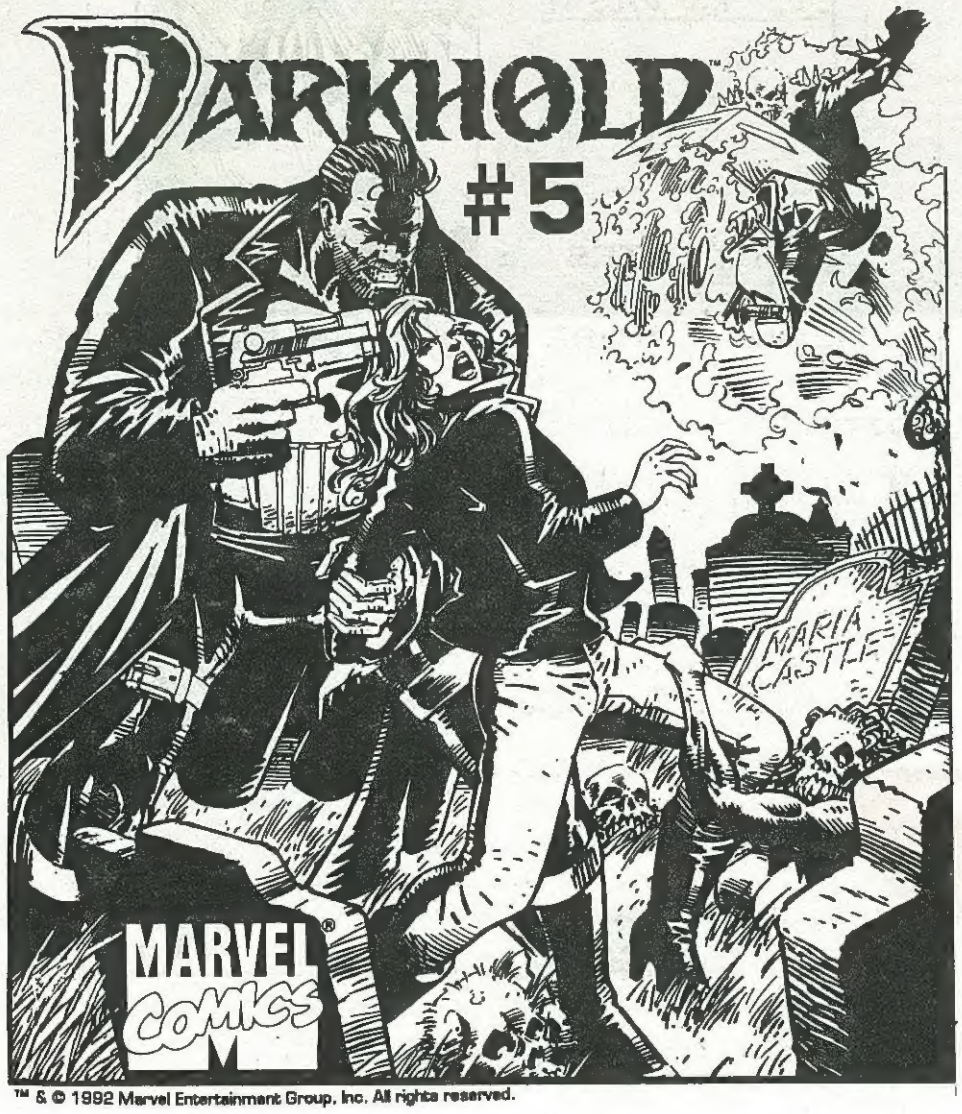
GHOST RIDER WANTS REV. STYGE DEAD.
PUNISHER WANTS STYGE TO BRING
HIS FAMILY BACK TO LIFE.

SOMEBODY'S GOING TO BE
VERY DISAPPOINTED.



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New Friends...
New Enemies...
New Challenges...
Superstar BART SEARS Joins the VALIANT Family as the regular Penciler of X-O MANOWAR with issue #14 Shipping in December
VALIANT
X-O MANOWAR #14 & 15 "THE DINOSAUR INVASION OF THE 20TH CENTURY"
FEATURING TUROK

some of what he believes coincides with the standard concept of moralistic values, they do so only by coincidence. Venom's alien personae is just that—alien.

At the same time, David Michelinie has to take this amoral character and develop in him a moral fiber that makes him an adequate protagonist for his own series. The reader has to have some sympathy for the character in order for the story to work adequately; Michelinie is able to develop that sort of sympathy without weakening the character.

*By the way, **Venom** has a pretty good plot as well. It is so easy to get caught up in the character of Venom that you can forget the plot that is occurring simultaneously. In the book, Venom has moved to Eddie Brock's home town of San Francisco to set up a new life away from Spider-man. (It seems that he and Spidey came to an agreement in New York: deciding that Spidey serves some useful purpose, Venom lets him live.) While out there, Venom begins to try his hand at being a good guy, but it really isn't his style. He doesn't give up, it just isn't his style. He runs afoul of a corrupt organization that is power hungry, and falls through a tunnel into the past. Oh yeah, Spider-man shows up to hunt him down, by the way.*

And in a delightful turn of events, Spider-Man becomes the heavy when he jumps to the wrong conclusions...

*The art by Mark Bagley and Sam De LaRosa is top notch. I've watched Mark Bagley work his way up through the ranks of Marvel, with his artwork constantly improving the entire time. Bagley's work on **New Warriors** was what first brought him to the fan's eye, and then his assignment on **Amazing Spider-Man** showed that he was capable of holding his own with the big names in the industry.*

And it couldn't happen to a more deserving guy; Mark has always wanted to illustrate Spider-Man, so it's very appropriate that he should not only get the chance, but should get recognition for doing it so very well.

***Venom** should put him through the roof and into the upper echelon of comics artists. Bagley's interpretation of Venom is unique, dynamic, and has a very distinct personality to it. De LaRosa inks Bagley better than he has been since Larry Malstahdt's work on **New Warriors**. I guess what I'm saying is that **Venom** looks as good as it reads.*

***Venom** is sure to be a smash hit for Marvel. If it wasn't enough to have this ultra hot villain done by this smash creative team, I understand that another Venom-like character will be showing up later on to create some carnage—and he's gonna bring some new friends.*

*I have to give Neil Gaiman credit. Not only does he put out the finest monthly comic on the market today, **Sandman**, but he also can take the old "death takes a holiday" joke and turn it into a great little story, without succumbing to the obvious cliches.*

***Death: The High Cost of Living** is a new three-issue mini-series starring that most cheerful of the endless, Death. Any reader of **Sandman** is already anxiously awaiting this book—and I promise them that it's worth the wait—but there are probably a whole lot of folks who haven't read **Sandman**, and who have no idea who Death is.*

Well, it's certain that none of our current readers know Death first-hand...

Death is...well, death. The end. The last visitor you'll have in your lifetime. You know, death.

Should we read that in a deadpan style?...

She is also Sandman's big sister, and part of a greater family known as the Endless—who are basically incarnations of some of the most primal aspects of existence. Death is not a large gloomy robed figure that carries a scythe and points at unfortunates with boney fingers; Death is a rather cute, somewhat punkish young woman who is just doing what she does (causing death and all that), and trying to have a good time in the meanwhile. That's the simple version, but it really isn't that simple.

I enjoyed Neil Gaiman's inclusion of a line of dialogue alluding to the image of Death to which you refer; it underscores Gaiman's intent to set his Sandman (and Death) storylines in a world remarkably like our own.

***Death: The High Cost of Living** is the story of the one day each century that Death becomes mortal so that she can experience all the sensations of being alive. In her day she meets up with a young man named Sexton, who happens to hate his name, and, it would seem, life to the point where he is ready to kill himself. Sexton meets up with a very old woman named Mad Hettie who happens to be alive only because she hid her heart somewhere so secret that even she can't find it. Mad Hettie wants her heart back so that she can die, and she is threatening to murder Sexton (who wants to kill himself) in an attempt to get Death to find her heart for her. See, I told you it wasn't that simple.*

You're right: it's intriguing that each character has a different view of Death, and that each character welcomes Death in one way, and yet the characters fear Death in another way.

*The other thing that **Death: The High Cost of Living** is about is life. Not the miracle of it, not the everyday gloom of it, but the glory of life. The everyday existence that we take for granted; all of the joys, smells, tastes, sights, sounds, and pleasures of living that everyone enjoys, but takes for granted. Of course, if the story is going to talk about life, then it must also naturally cover the subject of death. Gaiman looks at the balance of things—the way that life is carefully structured so that we think we understand what is happening until death shows up, but then we discover that we really don't understand it at all.*

*Gaiman could easily have gotten preachy with his story, but anyone who reads his work knows that he wouldn't—and he didn't. The message of **Death** is very subtle, relying more on natural intuition than on heavy handed symbolism. Oh sure, the idea of having Death being the only character in the book who seems to appreciate life is fairly symbolic...but some things are to be expected.*

*The art for **Death** was done by **Shade** artist Chris Bachalo. It's great work. Bachalo creates a beautiful atmosphere for the story to take place in, and he draws Death with a wonderful physical personality about her; sort of the demented young woman who knows more than she is letting on, but maybe is just putting on that atmosphere for show. Bachalo has a nice consistency from character to character, having each character have its own personality and appearance. Too many artists today will rely on one stereotype physique, and then use only overt body language. Bachalo doesn't. The others have an art style that they want to convey so much that they forget to put substance into their work. Bachalo doesn't do that either; style and substance—wow, what a concept.*

At the same time, Bachalo's figures have a litheness, a grace, and a strength that many artists have difficulty conveying. I'd love to see him illustrate ***Sandman*** for a story arc or two.

*I agree. Despite how much I like the art on **Death** though, it is still the story—and in all likelihood, the character—that stays with me. **Death** isn't an action-adventure book, so it might put off the spandex and tights crowd, but I urge everyone to give this book a chance. Maybe if we're lucky enough people will buy the book and demand that it continue. Wait a second, I think I just wished for a widespread, lingering Death—I guess I really do love this book.*

Last Week's *CSN* was a big 12 pager featuring a spotlight on *Vertigo* and the December Hot Picks.

Next Week *CSN* will feature more reviews and a special surprise feature. Don't miss it!

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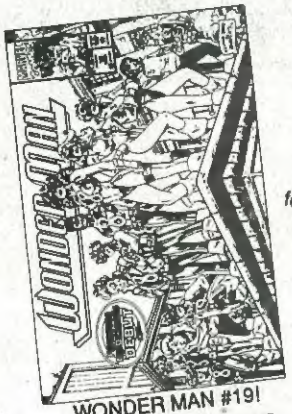

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